



Spectrum computing today



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Spectrum computing today

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A look at Spectrum adventure game writing today.

('Back to the Spectrum' will return next issue)

If you enjoy ZX F and you want it to continue then consider yourself duty bound to let me know this (mail@cwoodcock.co.uk). All other feedback will be gratefully received also - criticisms (please be kind), improvement suggestions and notifications of any errors you think you've spotted are essential for this sort of project to succeed.

ZXF now has a voluntary purchase scheme. If you have downloaded and enjoyed an issue of ZX F, and if you are able to afford to, please consider paying £1 for your issue via the Paypal button on at the ZX F website ('magazine' page).

If you would like to contribute to future issues of ZX F - even if it's just to write a letter - **please do**; contact me again by the email address above.

Editor: Colin Woodcock (mail@cwoodcock.co.uk)

Website: www.zxf.cjb.net

Contributors this issue: Matthew Harrodine, Simon Ulyatt, Nick Humphries, Ramsoft, Jarek Adamski, Dave Mills, John King and Thomas Eberle. A big thankyou also to all letter writers.



I am computer literate. It's a label I'm comfortable with. I wouldn't describe myself as a 'nerd' or a 'geek' - even if I used such terms, which I don't - but I am reasonably competent with a computer. I learnt to program BASIC on the Spectrum (naturally), then on the BBC for my A-Level in Computer Science, then on the SAM Coupe and finally on the PC (good old QBASIC). I've dabbled with Visual BASIC. I'm happy with DOS and all flavours of Windows, and I have some experience with MacOS and RISCOS. I can get the hang of most PC applications fairly rapidly if I need to use them. People come to me with their PC problems and I can usually get them sorted out. Which I am happy to do.

Despite my skills, I still run into things that stump me - as we all do - from time to time. Things that others find simple. Back in 1999, a thing that stumped me for a while was this 'newsgroup' thing called comp.sys.sinclair. At this point in time I was several months into the experience of actually having an Internet connection at home (having previously only used it in Cyber Cafes and the like). I had learnt the basics of email and was already on my way to completing my first ever website for the school I worked in; although I was a mere fledgling, therefore, I had made good use of my time. But how the hell did one access a 'newsgroup'? I often came across references to CSS on web pages, but all of these seemed to assume that the visitor knew what a newsgroup was and how to get to it. Of course I worked it out eventually, and now - in hindsight - I wonder how on earth something so simple could have taken

me so long to work out.

Since 1999, of course, Internet usage has exploded. The web is now a 'mainstream' resource, pushing computer literacy up the ladder of respectability, and while movie stars might still like to say that they don't know how to turn a computer on, less and less people now think that this is a cool thing to for them to say. It's all too easy for us to forget, amidst all of this enthusiasm, that computers are actually still quite hard things to get your head around if you've not had a considerable bit of experience with them.

Which is why I become quite upset when I read some of the disparaging remarks made in CSS to newcomers asking an honest, but simple question (and usually doing so very politely). For example, "Hi there - can anyone here tell me where I can find a game called 'Manic Miner' that I used to play?" Yes, we've seen questions like this a hundred times before, but do we have to be quite so demeaning in our replies? "Try reading the FAQ before you post next time"; but does the visitor necessarily know that there is an FAQ and where it is. "Can't you even manage a Google search?" But does the visitor necessarily know what Google is (I recently discovered that a friend of mine, immensely skilled in electronics and logical systems had never even heard of it)? If a car pulled up next to you in your town and the driver politely asked you the way to the nearest supermarket, would you stamp your feet like a two-year-old and complain that visitors never bother to consult the information map in the town hall? Why, then, should we treat visitors

to our online community any differently?

We can choose to be annoyed by these posts or we can choose to be delighted that the community is potentially about to be enlarged. And it actually takes no more time or effort to write an encouraging message than a rude one: "Hi there - welcome to comp.sys.sinclair - you'll find the answer to your question (and many more besides) at www.sinclairfaq.com. Enjoy!"

To put it another way:

You can give a man a fish and he will eat for a day.

You can teach a man to fish and he will eat for a lifetime.

But if you criticise the man for not knowing where the river is, he'll probably decide he never liked fish anyway.

Or something. All of us have been in the situation at one time or another where we've worried about asking about something everyone else seems to know about. Imagine what you would feel if you did ask and were then ridiculed by someone (and imagine the sorts of words you would later use to describe that person when you relay the incident to a friend over a pint). Do we really need to be so precious?

Until Christmas.

Colin Woodcock

zxf@woodcock.co.uk



ZXIF LAUNCHES • CSS FAQ • VBSPEC • AY RIDERS • MICRO MART
COMPETITION • SPECTACULATOR 5.1 • YS CDS • ZXCF • REALX

ZXF NEWS

> Shameless self-plug time...

At ZXF we know there's nothing more embarrassingly amusing than an act of gross self-deception, which is probably the best summary for the **new and exciting** range of **ZXF merchandise** now awaiting your purchase at the ZXF shop **chez cafePress.com**. Decorated in a delightful collection of greens, **www.cafeshops.com/zxf** is now settled in alongside its many neighbours and has already made a reputation for itself by trying to steal sugar from the nearby **www.cafeshops.com/c64files** across the street. They never see the funny side of anything.

You'll be delighted to learn that the ZXF shop stocks branded mugs, T-shirts, mouse mats and more. Yes indeed. There's even a ZXF thong for the ladies (please note, ZXF can accept no responsibility for relationships terminated upon receipt of this gift).



ZXIF launches. Gawd bless her.



Is that cool or did I just leave the window open too long? ZXF apparel at cafePress.com

> New Spectrum label

Inspired by **Cronosoft**, ZXF has taken a step into the scary world of software. Intended as a new label for text adventures - or *Interactive Fiction*, as these are now called - **ZXIF** launches alongside the publication of this very issue of ZXF with the release of its first 48k title, **Blink**. *Blink* takes place in the fictional Cornish village of Bostagel and involves a bad case of time freeze for you to sort out. Written by yours truly using the Professional Adventure Writing System, the game is heavy on text and pitched generally at a level that should accommodate the beginner, whilst a couple of more taxing puzzles should keep the more seasoned adventurers occupied.

Blink can be purchased online via *PayPal* from the *load* section of the ZXF website (**www.zxf.cjb.net**) and will cost you £1.99 plus 99p postage and packing for UK

destinations. Alternatively, if you would prefer to pay by cheque, you can send an email request to **zxif@woodcock.co.uk**, and in your reply you'll be told where to send the lolly. Overseas buyers, please contact me by email and we'll work out the cost of postage just as quickly as possible.

And in return you'll get a boxed Spectrum cassette - labelled - with a full colour printed inlay card. But if you'd rather just play the game on a PC to see what it's like, *Blink* will be available for free for a while at the ZXF website (using the rather excellent *ZZ Spectrum Java* emulator), so you won't even have to part with a penny to find out what it's all about.

If you've written a previously unreleased text/graphic adventure game for the Spectrum and would like to see it published under the ZXIF label, drop me a line at the email address above. As per the Cronosoft model, profits will be split 50-50, so 50p for a £1.99 title (it takes a pound to make each cassette) and 50p per pound charged thereafter. If you've never written one, but would like to have a go, check out the adventure writing guide in **exp**. It's not all that hard, really.

> £1 for ZXF?

ZXF now has a voluntary purchase scheme. If you have downloaded and enjoyed an issue of ZXF, and if you are able to afford to, please consider paying £1 for your issue via the *Paypal* button on at the ZXF website ('magazine' page).



FURTHER FAQs

> CSS FAQ update

The tour-de-force that is the **comp.sys.sinclair FAQ** (www.sinclairfaq.com) has had yet another update. The May 2003 version of possibly the most comprehensive Sinclair document anywhere in the world has had a number of new entries added, including links to the new Spectrum label **Cronosoft** and to ZXF's very own online shop! [Enough with the sales pitch -Ed] Best of all for PDF fans like myself, you can now download the whole lot in PDF format, print it off and stick it in a ring file for easy reference (Paperless office? Never!). Although, at 93 pages long you might need a spare ink cartridge at the ready and a soothing cup of tea to hold your hand through the experience. Nonetheless, a fantastic resource.

SEVENUP: GROWN UP

> Graphics editor out of beta

Metabrain's superb spectrum graphics editor **SevenUP** has taken the brave step over the beta threshold. Version 1.0 was released in June and now can import and convert many of the popular image formats such as BMP, GIF and PNG. Compared to the likes of LCD's **BMP2SCR Pro** and Derek Jolly's **YASPIC** (see last issue), the conversion is fairly unspectacular, however the pure felxibility of the editor more than makes up for this (you can always open images previously converted elsewhere, after all) and - given the frequency of Metabrain's updates so far - it wouldn't surprise me one jot if future versions start adding in more complex conversion options. He's obviously a seriously dedicated chap. www.speccy.org/metabrain/ for more information.

STATE-DEPENDENT SNAPPING

> .SZX format documented

The snapshot as a file format is now pretty much obsolete as a method of spectrum software distribution. Virtual cassette and disk files are now the main vehicle for this - and quite right too. This is not to say that none of us use snapshots for our own personal use at home, of course; as a method of saving progress made in a tough game they are invaluable, and snapshot files are still employed for the Speccy Tour each year.

One of the problems with the existing snapshot formats - **.Z80** and **.SNA**, both exceedingly long in the tooth now, by the way - is that they don't include any information about the hardware state of the system the snapshot has been created on - what's going on in the nether regions (ZX Printer, Multiface, Currah μ Speech, etc), for example, or what tape file's in the virtual cassette player at the moment (and what position it's in - crucial for multiload games).

Since version 2.5, **Spectaculator** (now in version 5.0) has developed and supported a new snapshot file format which overcomes this limitation: the **ZX-State** - or **.SZX** - format. Spectaculator author Jonathan Needle has now got around to documenting this format and the (very detailed) results can be found at his site: www.spectaculator.com/docs/zx-state/intro.shtml

Cue, incidentally, a very long and technical discussion in **css** between Jon and Phil Kendall, and the sensation of an almighty rush of wind passing over my head...

Not for the faint hearted, then, but brilliant stuff, all the same.

CSSCGC2003 UPDATE

My, but you've been busy. With 21 entries, the **comp.sys.sinclair Crap Games Competition 2002** was hardly the most well-endowed incidence of the annual competition. For the 2003 event, however, you seem to have been working away like beavers to compensate. With no less than 42 entries received so far (and more, no doubt, by the time this is published), shady host **Dave the Lurker** has had to take the unprecedented step of splitting up the entries over more than one web page. And, with submissions such as Lawrence Llewelyn-Bowen's **Advanced Wallpaper Construction Kit** and the re-emergence of **Millionaire**, last year's winner, in a special 'Cheating Bast. Edition' (for which, read same game submitted by different guy), it looks like 2003 is going to be a vintage year. It's nice to know that in a world with so many problems we can, er, make a few more...

The place to go is <http://8bitorbust.info/cgcl>. You've five months left: get coding!



THE FAT LADY HAS SUNG

► *Spectrum loses to Amiga in the Micro Mart computer 'World Cup'*

Alas, it was not to be... Beating the Oric Atmos, the Vic 20 and the Amstrad CPC to make it through to the final round of **Micro Mart** (www.micromart.co.uk) magazine's 'Home Computer World Cup' competition, the Spectrum found in the Commodore Amiga an adversary just too strong to trounce. In a two week online vote that pulled in several hundred votes (the highest of the competition), the final count was 45% to the Spectrum and 55% to

the Amiga.

The contest started in November 2002, with 16 home computer formats selected to fight it out against each other in a knockout competition that saw weekly jousts between opponents. Surprise results on the way to the final included the defeat of the Atari ST in the first round at the hands of the Amstrad CPC (and likewise the Commodore 64 in the quarter finals) and the PC falling to noneother than the humble BBC

(which eventually ended up in third place). The last battle earned a full, two page spread in issue 743 of the UK computer magazine, with the Spectrum argued for by yours truly and the Amiga handled by regular 'Amiga Mart' columnist Sven Harvey.

A few searches at Micro Mart's website will turn up the text for each round of the competition if you missed out on the drama. My argument for the final is below.

ZX Spectrum, Argued by Colin Woodcock

First published in MicroMart magazine, Issue 743, April 10th 2003

See also <http://www.micromart.co.uk/content/features/default.asp?Category=Article&Type=&ID=1007>

The Amiga is a much-loved computer. With good reason. When I got my first glimpse of this wonderful machine my jaw just simply dropped. Even by today's standards, the basic A500 can still pack a punch. And on this, my best Spectrum buddy's first step away from the 8-bit world, I got my first taste of a WIMP GUI, of photo-realistic graphics, of amazing sound and more. I wanted one.

In fact, the Amiga is the single machine in this contest (other than the PC and the Spectrum) that I do now actually own. Last autumn - some 13 years after first my eyes grew green and greedy at this sight - I finally got my hands on one. One reasonably pleasant evening later and it was consigned to a box in the shed. You see I might be an Amiga owner now, but I wasn't when it counted. And the love just isn't there.

Why didn't I get an Amiga back then? Cost. Practically packed with high-spec hardware, the Amiga was way out of my price range. Instead,

my upgrade route in 1990 was to the SAM Coupé, and here's the thing: despite three subsequent years of happy computing with that superior machine, it's still the Spectrum I return to.

I loved my SAM. 256 colours (no colour clash), 512K RAM (what could possibly use all that?), twin 3.5" floppy drives, the best in-built BASIC I've ever used; it was a dream come true for this Spectrum user. I still have it, but that too resides now in a taped-up box. Meanwhile, my rubber-keyed, 48K Spectrum gleams beautifully on my desk. Would it be any different if I had bought an Amiga instead of a SAM? Actually, I don't think it would.

Because the Spectrum is that first love which just can't be forgotten. Precisely because of its limitations and because so many struggled so hard to overcome them (and still do), because of its low cost that made computing accessible to so many for the first time and because it was (and continues to be) expanded on in more ways than could possibly have been

initially envisaged, it represents the very spirit of invention, inclusion and ingenuity. The essence of working with Spectrums today lies in extremely creative thinking within a very hard set of very real restrictions; in that sense it is a metaphor for life itself.

And thus it merits the crown of this competition. The Amiga is a fantastic computer. But the Spectrum - I believe - is a legend.





THE COMPLETE YS

> New CDs from Mort

Remember the Crash CDs reported on in ZXF03? You might recall that a chap named Stephen Stuttard (aka **Mort** at WoS Forums) scanned every last issue (plus a few extras), burned the lot onto 5 CDs and then practically gave them away for a mere £20. Well now he's gone and done it again, this time with **Your Sinclair**, arguably the favourite Spectrum publication of the UK scene.

YS ran for nearly eight years, launching at the start of 1986 (following a couple of years under the title *Your Spectrum*) and managing 93 issues in total.

ZXF hasn't yet managed to get its hands on these CDs yet, but if they're anything like as good as the Crash CDs then fans are in for a big, big treat. Indeedy.

AY REMAKES

> Riders release second album

Hot of the heels of their first release, *YOU ARE ADULT*, chiptune-band **AY Riders** have released their second collection of Spectrum 128 tunes. *DO YOU REMEMBER?* is a remakes album, featuring a wide variety of tracks, ranging from a version of Mike Oldfield's *Incantations 3* to an extremely competent version of *That Titanic Song*. There's also a version of **Tatu's** *30 Minut* and, as an additional track (and as a rather splendid demonstration of just how skilled these chaps are) this has been mixed into the original, vocals and all (surely the girls could use this as one of those extra tracks you get on CD singles?).

The AY Riders are a European collaboration, comprising YERZMYEY from Poland, FACTOR 6, TDM and X-AGON from the Czech

Republic, MEG US from Russia and the UK's very own GASMAN.



DO YOU REMEMBER can be downloaded now as a series of free MP3 tracks from their site at <http://ayriders.zxdemo.org>

1K FORAY

> Minigame competition 2003

It's minigame time again. Last year, the Spectrum chalked up 10 entries in the quest to find the best game written in just 1024 bytes; although four of these made it into the eventual top ten (with a total of 62 entries), the crown of the competition in the end went to Robin Harbron's C64 title **Splatom**, with the highest Spectrum entry being Paolo Ferraris' **1Kanoid** at number five. This year there are two categories to the competition, with the 1K game reprised for a second outing alongside a new 4K contest. The overall size of your entry must not exceed these limits, and this includes headers, loaders, basic stubs, and data files.

The closing date for entries is September 29, 2003, at precisely 12.00 GMT. You can make as many entries as you like. Full rules, alongside the details of any submissions received so far can be found on the minigame website over at www.fid2.com/minigame/. There's also a discussion board for general debate and support, and the site links also to the previous two competitions.

TOP STUFF

> Hit counter soars at YSNNRY

Your Sinclair Rock 'n' Roll Years webmaster Nick Humphries has 'come up trumps' with a couple of new ideas recently, which have brought visitors to his site in their droves.

Clicking up hits in their thousands, Nick's Spectrum **Top Trumps** page has been referenced in a number of non-Spectrum websites, making it a top internet destination for surfers worldwide. The premise is faithful to Top Trumps as we knew and loved it, with each player receiving cards from a deck of 74, each rating a classic Spectrum title for each of the following categories:

Whooshability - Was the game dead fast to play, or was the gameplay of a more sedate nature?

Stokability - Did the game charm you with its sickening cuteness or did it have the hugability of Margaret Thatcher?

Blastability - Were there plenty of things to shoot, kill, maim or destroy? Or was it a game you could safely play in front of your granny without her tutting?

Ponderability - How puzzling was the game to play? Did you have to stop and think every now and then or was it a simple case of shoot first and ask questions later?

Memorability - Do people still talk about the game today, a couple of decades since its first release? Or do they rank alongside Brosettes?

Players then select one of these categories (without knowing the other's card) and then compare to win the pair.

Nick's since followed this up with second online game, **Who wants to be a Squillionaire**, which - as you can probably guess - consists

IS THIS THE COOLEST SPECTRUM IN THE WORLD?

> **ZXCF CompactFlash interface from Sami Vehmaa**



That there is a Compact Flash card peeking out of the Spectrum above, yes it is. And since last issue's feature of Roelof Koning's work, the subject has been creeping up quite a bit in online discussions recently.

Sami's system above uses **Gary Lancaster's ResiDos** to access the CF card and also features a Versatile Memory Unit that offers up to 1MB RAM in (lots of) 16K pages. He is also working on a version for the +3 which is compatible with the latest of Gary's +3e ROMs.

The bad news is that the soldering is far from easy, so electronics lightweights like myself will have to be content to look on in envy for the time being. Perhaps, however, another significant step has been taken towards the plug-in interface that someone, one day, is going to design and get Sintech to distribute. I'm allowed to dream, aren't I?

You can read up on the **ZXCF** at <http://home.sol.se/amiga/>, Sami's ZX Spectrum Hardware DIY site, and ResiDos can be found - along with information about the +3e ROMs - at www.zxplus3e.plus.com.



YSRNRV (cont)

of ten questions, each with four possible answers. Final answer? Each question features a screenshot with four possible titles to choose from.

On the response to *Top Trumps*, Nick told **ZXF**, "It was amazing, especially considering that it was a freak idea that came out of the blue on a late Friday night! I sent it to the b3ta mailing list on the off-chance that they'd like it, they put it into their newsletter, and I got around 4,500 visitors on the afternoon their newsletter went out. To put that in perspective, the average number of visitors to the website is around 1,500 (lower in the summer months).

"I started getting referrers from other people's home pages all over the world, including many in foreign languages from people who I was rather surprised had made the connection between *Top Trumps* and the Speccy.

"The cherry on the cake was the mention in *Web User*, a print magazine that I've never heard of, but hey, it's all good publicity for the site.

"A month after I did *Top Trumps*, I wrote the herbal-Nyctol-induced *Who Wants To Be A Squillionaire?* b3ta plugged it again, and that day I got over 8,000 visitors, and the additional referrers from other people's sites, blogs, LiveJournals, etc... The bandwidth for the month *Squillionaire* came out came within a few K of my 10Gb/month limit (usually it hovers around 6Gb) and was easily the most popular month for the website.

"And the reasons for the games, apart from strange brainwaves that occasionally hit me? Mainly just to teach myself something new when it comes to programming Perl CGI scripts. It's also a way of avoiding my commitments to *The Tipshop* (thousands of



apologies to Gerard - I'm meant to be programming for him right now, but I've just finished writing a script that does something incredibly silly, and that idea was implanted by a friend of mine who casually mentioned "I wondered if you'd thought of doing something like this?" - I managed to twist it into an idea which will teach me a new Perl thing, and there goes another 48hour project...)

"Now that things have calmed down after the two game releases, Top Trumps continues to be slightly more popular than Squillionaire - guess it's the nostalgia value."

And all this while Nick's main project is progressing - the **Your Sinclair Rock'n'Roll Years TV show**. Planned for later this year, the documentary will be 30-40 minutes long with plenty of movie clips of Spectrum games accompanied by an 1980s soundtrack. The project is extraordinarily ambitious, but a look at the preview page on the YSRNRY website will convince you that Nick is taking the task very seriously and has already developed some serious video skills. The demo of the Interface 2 'flyover' is particularly impressive.

So it's hardly surprising, with all this work, that Nick's site flipped 1 million visitors earlier this year. Congratulations, I believe, and well-deserved.

Top Trumps:
www.ysmry.co.uk/cgi-bin/toptrumps.pl

Who wants to be a Squillionaire:
www.ysmry.co.uk/cgi-bin/squill.pl

YSRNRY TV Show:
www.ysmry.co.uk/tvprog/index.htm

MORE EXPANSION

> **YABUS.ZX** from Jarek Adamski

More hardware, and this one looks mightily impressive. Jarek Adamski is a name you might recall from ZXF03 as the hardware guru behind Andrew Owen's **ZX Spectrum SE**. Jarek has, for some time now, been an innovator of add-ons for the various Spectrums and the Sam Coupé. He's also authored the **ZXVGS** operating system for Spectrum compatible computers.

His latest creation is the **YABUS.ZX**, an edge-connector interface offering an external bus for a whole range of peripherals. Just so that we're clear, these are peripherals designed for use with the YABUS, not just any old peripheral, but a considerable range of such interfaces do already exist.

Here, Jarek describes the **YABUS.ZX** in his own words:

What is YABUS.ZX? Two YABUS slots in a small, through interface, that connects to the rear slot of the ZX Spectrum.

It could be you wanted to connect some extra interfaces to your Spectrum. You had to join them in "a sequence" behind the Spectrum or disconnect one before connecting another, as many of them were non-through. The connection was not always perfect and you had to do some experiments with the 'angle of insertion', etc.



Now it can be different; with YABUS.ZX, you can connect the extensions easy and easily disconnect them (of course whilst the power is off!)

I don't know if you ever tried to build your own interface - perhaps 8255, perhaps AY, perhaps something more advanced. My experience says there always were two important problems

- 1) how to connect the signal bus,*
- 2) what to do to keep the possibility to connect something else (non-through, such as a Timex FDD 3000 interface).*

YABUS.ZX removes both these problems at once. It's a through interface and the YABUS slots are easily accessible from the top of its box. I might mention that in YABUS (as a whole) modules called YAMOD are plugged into the YABUS slots

Several years ago I made a prototype of YABUS for my Sam Coupé. To have more fun, I built a YAMOD with AY-3-8910. It worked and played music. :-) Now, I've plugged this YAMOD into YABUS.ZX. *It is correctly detected and works!*

This is a special property of YABUS - the hardware independency. The same YAMOD can be plugged into a wide range of computers based on Z80 CPU - e.g. ZX, Spectrum, Timex FDD 3000, Sam, MSX, CPC...

Of course, it doesn't make sense, but it is important in case of some kinds of YAMOD. I didn't try with computers with different CPUs (6502, 68000), but this is also possible (I would like to try with Amiga...).

Both the YABUS and most of YAMODs are very simple, so they are cheap.

I've mentioned that you can easily build an YAMOD. From my side, I've designed several modules and



some more are on the way. They are:

- YAMOD.ATBUS - IDE multiplexer (drives harddisks, CD readers, Compact Flash, etc).
- YAMOD.EPROG - theoretically an EPROM programmer, but practically a universal parallel interface (30 bits).
- YAMOD.IDE8255 - easier (read: slower) IDE multiplexer.
- YAMOD.ZXINPUT - gives you the possibility to connect a PC keyboard and mouse (seen as a Kempston Mouse or Sam Mouse). Also can generate interrupts on every screen line as the Sam does.
- YAMOD.KJ - just Kempston joystick.
- YAMOD.KMOUSE - means Kempston Mouse - requires a mouse from Amiga.
- YAMOD.FDC 765A - floppy driver controller. Will work in two modes: ZX Spectrum +3 compatible and ISA (the same as you connect a ISA Multi I/O card).
- YAMOD.AY - sound interface. Extra option is IIC magistral and a possibility to add 8kB EEPROM, used by ZXVGS.
- YAMOD.EPLIP - closely undefined (for me) very fast parallel interface, with FIFO buffers.
- YAMOD.8250 - serial interface - as in PC. ZXVGS can use a PC mouse connected to this

module (I know, I have the prototype inside my Sam Coupe).

- YAMOD.8211 - PC-like printer interface.
- YAMOD.MB02 - is an 8255 PIO with DB37 slot, as in MB-02.
- YAMOD.PCMOUSE - simple RS232 for PC mouse - only 1200bps and 19200bps.
- YAMOD.SO - for radio amateurs - turns your computer into a TNC modem. You need only the BayCom modem at the end. (Not exactly for ZX Spectrum, but...)
- YAMOD.ETHERNET - perhaps a bit expensive, but there's a module (www.embeddedthemet.com/), that doesn't need a PC to work.

More information at:

<http://zx.yarek.com/dYABUS-en.html>

I will offer for sale both ready-made interfaces and DIY kits. Full documentation guaranteed in .html and .jpg files. (Also for Eagle (www.cadsoft.de/) .sch and .brd files) You can also expect support for YAMODs in ZXVGS (<http://zxvgs.yarek.com/>)

Now I want you to think how can you use the YABUS.ZX...

> zxUSB from Dave Mills

Yet more hardware; in this case 'unmade' hardware: a schematic for a USB interface for the Spectrum - and this one gets my personal nomination for being put in a glass box to have sugar thrown at it. The possibilities are endless and it takes us one step closer still to that dream of the handy mass storage device - in this case, of course, those ridiculously small memory sticks. The project is still in an early stage, but Dave (known to us all,

incidentally, as shady comp.sys.sinclair Crap Games Competition 2003 host Dave the Lurker) welcomes any comments on the design. He told ZXF 'the design is totally free. To misquote Crowley, 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the license'. I have no objection to anyone making and selling these, I hope they do in fact.' **Sintech** - are you listening?



Coming soon to a Spectrum near you?

Dave's original [css](#) post:

Q. What is zxUSB?

A. zxUSB is an attempt to get a working USB controller on to the humble speccy. It is based on the NatSemi USBN9603 USB controller IC.

Q. What software exists?

A. None at present. If you are seriously interested in writing a driver for a piece of hardware, then contact me and I'll try to make a development board available to you.

Q. Where can I find it then?

A. Glad you asked that. Take a look at:

<http://8bitorbust.info/sinclair/spectrum/hardware/zxUSB/RELEASE1.0/>

Questions / comments / really silly mistakes to point out ?

This is a very exciting hardware project that potentially any of us could get our hands on - soldering skills or not - if it should come to be distributed. The current design is for a straightforward edge connector device, but Dave is also developing a version for YABUS.ZX.



Emulator news

BASin

No release as yet of the upcoming version 0.5 of SPIN previewed last issue, but if ■ break's being taken it's assuredly a well-deserved one. Meanwhile, Paul Dunn - co-creator of this superb emulator (I've said it before and I'll say it again - that keyboard helper is an inspired piece of work) - has returned to his original vision of SPIN and produced **BASin**. And a delightful program it is too.

BASin has evolved quite a bit since the preview release mentioned in the last issue of ZXF; the latest version available (as I write) ■ alpha 8. Along the way there's been a little discussion as to what this program actually is. Is it an emulator? Is it a new version of Sinclair BASIC?

Actually, it's something altogether different, and the key to this is in its subtitle (for want of ■ better word): *Sinclair BASIC Development Environment*.

BASin is essentially a utility for writing ordinary Spectrum BASIC. The original 48K ROM ■ still tucked away in there, interpreting all the code written, but between this and the user are all manner of tools to make the experience easier. For starters, commands are entered letter-by-letter instead of through the keyboard choreography required of the original tokens (and all non-alphanumeric characters are mapped onto your PC keyboard's layout, so you won't even have to hunt around for the quotation marks or the dollar sign anymore). Then there are plenty of windows to open up that pull apart what is actually going on in your program whilst it runs: ■ runtime BASIC viewer, for example, which shows a complete listing of your program independently of the main

'emulator' window and which, when the program is paused, will show you exactly where the computer is in your code (you can then execute it from that point step-by-step or line-by-line); a variables window that lists all the variables in play and their current state. And so on. You can cut and paste code, and also search ■ with a Find and Replace tool.

BASin is already an immensely useful tool, but a look at the menu items not yet implemented whets the appetite still further: the 'UDG/Charset Editor' by itself could be a godsend if ■ means you'll be able ■ WYSIWYG the little critters straight into decimal. The time I used to spend with squared paper and a calculator...

Spend a little time with BASin and you'll soon find plenty of reasons to wish that this had been around twenty years ago. It's top stuff, and you can download it from http://homepage.nfw.com/paul.dunn4/BASin_R6.zip

vbSpec

In April, Chris Cowley announced that he will no longer be maintaining the only Spectrum emulator to be written completely in Visual Basic. But, fear not, vbSpec fans, Chris has passed on the project to Miklos Muhi. These are clearly very capable hands, since ■ new version - version 1.80 - has already been released under Miklos' authorship. This features joystick support (Kempston, cursor, Fuller, Sinclair1, Sinclair2 and user defined), full screen mode, multiface poke emulation and more. Good luck Chris in your new ventures and to Miklos, welcome. vbSpec now resides at www.muhi.org/vbspec/

Spectaculator

Version 5.0 and now 5.1 of Jonathan Needle's Spectaculator have arrived since the preview of 5.0 last issue, the latter being brought in at the start of July.

5.0 came in pretty much as described last issue, with one simply superb addition - emulated microdrive motor noise. It works brilliantly - even the noise made by an empty drive queried ■ produced on demand. This is one of those 'value added' little extras that don't need to be part of an emulator (just like black and white TV mode) but which make the whole thing so much fun.

5.1 adds in support for AVI video recording, which I think was the remit of **RealSpectrum** only previously. So now, at 50 frames per second, you can record your ZX performances for posterity. The idea that a telly somewhere showing a skillful handling of Jet Set Willy might have eyes glued to it might seem to be stretching fandom a bit to far, but think how much time you spend in pubs with your attention drawn hypnotically to the games machine in the corner showing demo mode...

The latest version also allows you to print on your real, flesh-and-blood printer directly from your emulated Spectrum via either the 128/+2/+2A/+3 RS-232 serial port or the +2A/+3 built-in Centronics parallel port; both of these are now supported. And you can now run multiple instances of Spectaculator (which you couldn't before).

With the complete range of 'official' Spectrums now covered by Spectaculator, it looks like Jon's becoming interested in the clones: 5.1 also includes some preliminary Pentagon 128 support to run demos requiring Pentagon timing.

www.spectaculator.com

Emulator news

RealX

RealX is coming... The long-awaited successor to the immensely popular RealSpectrum, now has a release date of September 2003. Note it in your diary. The new emulator promises to be quite unlike anything we've ever seen before; in anticipation of the big event, ZXF caught up with the Ramsoft team to get the low down on this program.

RealSpectrum, for some time now, has been considered by many the most comprehensive Spectrum emulator in existence. We've been waiting with baited breath for your next generation windows emulator for some time now, and it says a lot about the popularity of RealSpectrum that the smallest bits of information about RealX seem to be received with great anticipation. Can we expect the same range of features from the new version that the DOS emulator has accumulated during its development?

RealX incorporates all the features that were available in RealSpectrum plus a lot of new ones, some of them will take advantage of the multimedia environment offered by Windows; here's a brief list of what to expect:

- A revolutionary user interface. We have designed a completely new and original concept for user interaction, based on intuitive manipulation of objects and extensive use of graphics. It's not like anything you have already used or seen anywhere, and like all radical innovations we expect people to love it or to hate it :-)
- Multi-channel audio (4 speakers) with customizable

positional effects

- Special post-processing multimedia effects (video interpolations, etc)
- Videoface emulation (through DirectShow video capture)
- TRUE GeneralSound emulation (multi-CPU)
- Variable CPU speed (turbo modes)
- Embedded MakeTZ and Tape Editor (featuring renewed engine)
- Enhanced networking capabilities

If it sounds too much ■ be true, you'll believe soon :-)

Has RealX been a complete rewrite or is it a development of existing RealSpectrum code?

RealX is a completely new emulator, totally rewritten from scratch. The RealSpectrum project is dated 1999 and the original plans were to emulate just 1/10th of what we have now - just 48K and 128K Spectrums, DISCIPLE and something else... no clones, no Interface 1, no MB-02+, etc.; fortunately, we designed it in a very modular way, so we haven't had too much trouble adding new computer models and peripherals. With RealX we go even further, allowing third-party plug-ins to extend the emulator's capabilities. The most important goals we intended to achieve with a complete rewrite were higher speed and flexibility; for example, the Z80 microcode core routines are now written in x86-MMX assembly optimized by hand and it's much faster than the old one: during the tests we have "clocked" our emulated Z80 up to 224MHz (64x) without noticeable slowdown!

Over the past eighteen months or so the emulator scene has

developed a great deal. Emulators such as SPIN and Spectacular have pushed the boundaries considerably, with contributions also from Klive, Espectrum and vbSpec. My guess is that users now have much higher expectations from a Windows emulator than they did at the start of this period, when ZX32 was still a solid favourite.

Some of the developments during this time have been in areas previously dominated only by RealSpectrum and perhaps also Z80 (eg, Interface One emulation), however we have also seen some very creative thinking surfacing as completely new emulator features - for example SPIN's Keyboard helper. What are your own favourites amongst these developments, and do you have any other thoughts on the direction Spectrum emulation has recently taken?

In our opinion, emulation accuracy takes the first place: not quantity, but quality. Hence we particularly prefer those works where efforts have been made to reproduce the behavior of real machines and peripherals as close as possible. The user interface then plays a very important role. Ideally we wish to save the user from any direct interaction with low-level settings by guessing what he's trying to achieve, and do that for him automatically (e.g. no messing with tons of obscure options but an "intelligent supervision" - like easy access to essential controls or automatic FlashLoad/FastLoad switching control): the user must be able to experience emulation only with a few clicks; this doesn't mean that RealX won't have lots of customizable options, but that the user will have to access them less frequently. Of course we're not going to name this or that emulator saying which one is best, worst or has followed the "right



Emulator news

way" of evolution. Our vision is that a new emulator should take advantage of the capabilities offered by modern hardware and operating systems: 3D effects for the GUI, multi-channel hardware mixing for audio, TCP/IP for ZXNetwork emulation and other services (file sharing, etc...) just to name a few; we did that in RealSpectrum at the time (surround sound, video filters) and we are going to do that again in RealX for today's computers

What's on the horizon for MakeZX?

We've just released another version of MakeZX (version 2.33 to be precise). Its main purpose is to introduce the CSW v2.0 format to the public, plus it extends MultiLoad (formerly known as Activision) support and is able to decode for a couple more loading schemes.

Who are Ramsoft? What do you do (when not writing Spectrum emulators)?

LUCA:

Hi, I'm 30 and I live in a small town near the sea called Grosseto in southern Tuscany. In the real life I'm about to become a computer engineer this fall and I have no doubt that my passion for computers and electronics entirely originates from the Spectrum, which I own since 1984. I like to practice open-air sports like riding the bike, volley and all the beach sports, and I have several interests and hobbies which I like to share with my friends. I'm a peaceful man and I'm against wars and hate.

STEFANO:

I'm 28 years old, I live in Arezzo, eastern Tuscany, where I'm working as an I.T. technician in a local company. I tried to graduate in I.T. engineering like

Luca, but I gave up too early. In the spare time I like to make small trips riding my motorbike; I also like playing guitar (of which I learned the basics myself in the past years) and I recently started to learn music "in deep" aiming to ...em... EMULATE the guitar soloists/virtuosos I like best (Joe Satriani, Steve Vai, John Petrucci, etc. - yes, it's DAMN hard!). Useless to say that I'm passionate of computers and electronics :)

I got my very first Spectrum in 1985, it was a 48K; later in 1992 I bought a 128K+ and in 1993 I found a second-hand DISCIPLE with a disc drive. Today I possess a lot of Sinclair machines and peripherals, plus a couple of Spectrum clones... I think I've become a little bit Speccy-maniac!!! ;)

* * *

So it appears that the most striking aspect of this new emulator will be in the user interface. Whilst Ramsoft wanted to keep actual screenshots under wraps for the time being, they did send ZXF a copy of their presentation made at the Varese Retrocomputing conference in April. Which includes some very interesting 3D models as well as a reference to skinning. A 3D emulator? Feast your eyes below and feel free to speculate...



WOS GOINGS ON

> New home page at WoS

Those of you who have visited www.worldofspectrum.org recently will have noticed a fresh new look to the home page. The design, crafted by **Paul van der Laan** is the winner of a competition held by WoS owner Martijn van der Heide, which came about as a result of a discussion in the forums area of the site as to whether or not WoS needed a new look.

My own view was not. That aside, however, Paul's design is unquestionably a superb piece of work. And what you might not have noticed yet is that there are actually two designs which alternate - one which features the original rubber-keyed Speccy and another which features the 128+. Paul actually created 3D models of each of these machines for the web page design and has also produced desktop wallpaper of his 48K model for download from WoS.

> Alchemist PD uploaded

So much has been added to WoS between issues of ZXF that it would be impossible to report on it all; an addition particularly worthy of note, however, is the release of the Alchemist Software library by Lloyd Garland in July. Alchemist PD was and is a major resource, featuring games, demos and many, many little utilities. The only problem is that - at present - the software is only available in .TDO format - the format used by the **Taledisk** disk archival tool (a generic tool not specific to the Spectrum). Once unpacked, the programs are stored in either +D or +3 disk images (and whilst pretty much all emulators can handle the latter now, you'll need **RealSpectrum** to read the former).

Alchemist Research, maintainers of the library, also published a fanzine - **AlchNews** - for many

years, the last six issues of which were available as PDF downloads, just like ZXF. These are still available for download at the Alchemist Research web site at <http://website.lineone.net/~alchemistresearch/>

MAGAZINE ZX GOES PDF

> New PDF mag

Speaking of PDF magazines, **Magazine ZX**, a new, online magazine in Spanish for Spectrum enthusiasts has appeared in both HTML and PDF versions. I don't understand a word of it myself, but looking at the careful step through on how to connect a 3.5 inch floppy drive to a +3, I very much wish I could. It looks superb. Both versions can be accessed at www.spec.cy.org/magazinezx/lista_revistas.php



VAT@EBAY

> Online marketplace adds in tax

It had to happen sooner or later. eBay, our online single source for all things Spectrum (when the local car boot sale fails to deliver) has restructured its fees pricing as of 1st July in response to a new European Union directive that VAT now has to be paid on all services and products sold from European Internet sites. The change has

enraged many traders, some who view it as European interference, others who seem to believe the new law is just being used by eBay as an excuse to increase their fees. Indeed, eBay have - in addition to implementing the VAT law - restructured their insertion, feature and final value fees at the same time, all changes taking place together on 1st July: 'We have raised some fees, reduced others, while keeping some the same.' And, in the meantime, all of us are confused.

Comments submitted by readers of the BBC News Online website in response to the story seem to suggest that many are misinterpreting this as a VAT on the final price of an item, which it is not. The VAT is charged only on the services sold by eBay to its users - in other words, the fees. So the Insertion Fee for an item priced initially between £1.00 and £4.99 has risen from 15p to 20p, for example, while the Final Value Fee on an item fetching between £30 and £599.99 has risen from 2.75% to 3.25 (FVFs on items below £30 remain fixed at 5.25%). A number of other services have seen rises also, such as the 'Buy it now' option (5p to 6p) and Photo hosting (10p to 12p for each photograph after the first, free one - of course you can always host the photographs yourself for nothing).

eBay announcement:

<http://pages.ebay.co.uk/vat-landing/pricing/>

BBC coverage:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/2968106.stm>

SIR CLIVE ROLLS ON

> 'C6' set for 2004 appearance

It's official: **Clive Sinclair** is better than George W Bush. At driving the Segway scooter around, that is. Where the leader of the free



world fell over the handlebars, Sir Clive made it all look easy in his recent road test for BBC News Online in August.

And whilst he did so, he happened to mention news of a successor to the C5 in the works, due to be unveiled, he claims, next year.

All Sir Clive would say about the new project, other than that it's being developed jointly with a British-based engineering company which specialises in compact electric motors and drive systems, is that it will be a 'new product designed at getting people around town.'

Can this be consigned to the same flying pie that includes the fabled 'ZX 2000' below its flaky pastry crust? And is Sir Clive genuinely onto something this time or will his new gamble, if it ever appears, be the last breath of Sinclair Research? Let's hope not. Read the full story (including ■ snazzy video clip of Sir Clive taking his test Segway for a spin) at:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/3125341.stm>



What are you going on about? 

Send your letters, viewpoints, mini articles, etc to zxf@cwoodcock.co.uk, with 'wibble' in the subject line.

There's been a view or two expressed in the online spectrum communities over the last four months. Ooooooooooooooh yes. Europe. Theft. Europe. WoS. Europe... Perhaps it's time we all took a few calming breaths and spent a moment on progressive muscle relaxation. Meanwhile, atop the umbrella factory...

I downloaded (and read of course) 3 issues of ZX Format. I'm in shock! So much is happening in ZX world! Hardware upgrades, new commercial software on tapes, new versions of emulators etc. Speccy lives!!!

I live in Poland and Spectrum was my first home computer - I was using it from march '87 to october '91 (first it was "gummy" Spectrum, then Timex 2048 with AY sound interface). When I sold it & bought Amiga 500 I was thinking that Spectrum was dead. Few years later, when I discovered emulators and new software (games & demos) I realised that I was wrong. And I'm happy that Speccy is immortal!

Today I've got Amiga 1200 (with few upgrades) and PC. I emulate Speccy almost everyday and I'm sure that there are many things to come.

Thank you for creating ZX Format! Keep doin' good work!

Greetings

Piotr Szymanski

Thanks for your letter Piotr. I cannot tell you what a buzz I get from receiving messages from so many countries. This has to be what the net is all about.

For those of you who are wondering, ZX Format was the name of my old website - which wasn't anything all that special, by the way - and was to have been the name of this magazine until I realised there had already been a Spectrum (disk-based) fanzine called this. So I think I've probably confused a few people along the way. As the Cornish say, *madder do ut?*

My name is Mihai and I am from Romania.

I read you ZXF magazine and I found it pretty interesting. Although I am a c64 maniac, addict :)) I am also interested in the speccy, from time to time I enjoy also watching speccy demos, mostly russian :)

The fact that made me write this to you is because I read that you've been here in Romania, helping the kids and everything else. I really appreciate that. I also really liked how you talked about Romania on your site. I am sick of people that show only the bad party from this country : stray dogs, kids with aids, ... we have so much other good things to show to Europe.

Keep the 8 bit faith alive,

Mihai

www.videocam.net.au/~hannibal

Mulumesc Mihai pentru scrisoarea ta. As many of you are possibly already aware, ZXF has a special interest in Romania and her people. I will always welcome any letters from Romania and, since I am able to read a little of this language, please don't feel you have to write to ZXF only in English.

So the following really made me happy - a Romanian friend, but also a lad who wasn't around in the days when it was easy to like the Spectrum.

Este o manie. Manie de care sunt si eu bolnav. Dar cred ca astfel de oameni sunt foarte multi. Revista aceasta asta este un lucru la care nu ma asteptam. Poate daca prindeam vremurile acelea cand ZX SPECTRUM era in floare

nu mi se parea ceva iesit din comun. Dar acum mi se pare un lucru extraordinar. Imi pare rau ca nu am prins vremurile alea, acum umbliu prin toate targurile de vechituri pentru a-mi cumpara casete, componente sau orice tine de ZX SPECTRUM.

FELICITARI!

KEEP IT REAL!

Aurel L, 21 ani

New, Real Spectra.

I don't want to get a PC to do my Spectrum programming. At forty times the price of what a 48K Spectrum would normally cost at Ebay, it's just too much - certainly if emulation is the only thing you're going to do.

There are a couple of Spectrum clones still in production, of which many are similar to the 128K with it's menus etc., but include extra features like disc drives and modems. Here are short descriptions of some of these spectrum compatible computers:

CommodoreONE

Ok, so this isn't really a spectrum, but it does have a spectrum mode, aswell as modes for Commodore 64, Amstrad CPC etc. This uses the Altera PLD chip, also used in the Sprinter.

Didaktik M90/M91

The Didaktik was a Slovakian computer (now being sold by Sintech in Germany) with twin joystick ports (kempston&sinc la ir).

Didaktik Kompakt

This is a Didaktik M with a built-in D80 floppy drive. (this floppy drive

can also be bought separately as an upgrade for the 16/48K spectrum or Didaktik M.)

There was a modification to make the Didaktik M and Kompakt compatible with the 128K Spectrum (apart from the 128K sound, this would be fixed with a hardware add-on called the Melodik which contained the necessary AY sound chip).

Kay 1024

A much expanded system. Released in 1998, although all I found on the internet suggests that it is no longer produced.

Some of the features:

- 10 MHz CPU
- 1Mb RAM
- Printer interface (ooh, proper printers!)
- Support for external disk drives.
- Built-in interface for Kempston and Sinclair joysticks.

Pentagon 256/512/1024

Pentagons can be very different (and they certainly are). The Pentagons come in kit form, and can be in C64-type cases, but can also be in PC tower cases with VGA monitors.

The Pentagons have a few incompatibilities with the other Spectrum clones.

Sprinter SP2000

This is a great computer, although this is not really a spectrum either. What the Sprinter is, is a computer that can act like a Spectrum. For this reason, the Altera PLD is used. This chip can change to the internal workings of any

hardware, so there is compatibility with many different clones. Peters Plus are currently working on adding a Sam Coupé mode.

The Sprinter can be bought from the Russian company Peters Plus, who have previously made many other Spectrum clones.

This computer can be used to write ZX Spectrum programs, you can transfer the program to a Spectrum emulator on a PC, or to a real Spectrum through the tape ports.

(For more about the Sprinter, see the 'Int'-section of ZXF Issue 2.)

ZS Scorpion

The Scorpion is another clone of the Spectrum, a lot more powerful than the Pentagon series. A board to 'downgrade' it to a Pentagon (for compatibility with the Pents) is available, although it is very expensive. Harddiscs and diskette drives are available for the computer, and you can switch off all the extra bits to get a fairly basic Spectrum 'mode'.

Handy links:

Commodore ONE:

<http://c64upgra.de/c-one/>

Pentagon:

N/A

Peters Plus:

www.petersplus.com

Scorpion:

<http://www.scorpion.ru>

Sintech:

<http://www.sintech-shop.de>

Now, what kind of Spectrum do I

want to get?

Sam Magnus Wilson

Last Sunday evening I finally downloaded in full Issue 4 of ZXF. Of course I read it and - believe or not - then I re-read it 4 times! Only one word can describe what I felt: FANTASTIC!

Your mag is very NICE! It was made by only you, hmmmmmm..... excellent! Thank you very much for every character, every sentence, every news. It was very hard work but I hope it'll continue. Come on, lets go!

We (WSS Team) will work, for you have to write a lot about nowadays of ZX Spectrum :) We've started something in the ZX-Spectrum's life and have many plans for the future. When we started programming Flash Beer we didn't think what will happen in the world. To sell the cassette version of Flash Beer was a small idea, but you can see what grew from it. Many new games entered into the market, which is a very good thing! Of course it's thanks to WoS forums and many people like you too. But we have to keep alive this fire more and more!

We think it could do only one way. Everybody has to work for heart, not for money. Our idea is that every WSS game will be free and every game will be available also on traditional cassette.

I don't know which job is harder, yours or ours. Every one is very-very important for the ZX-Spectrum. In future may I offer my help to you? If anything I can help you (for example, news



about games, etc.), please write to me. My English is very weak, but I'm sure anybody would help me to correct it.

Sincerely yours,

Pgyuri

WSS Team

In case you missed the review last issue, WSS's game, *Flash beer* can be downloaded for free from www.c-system.hu/edy/wss/fib/. *Flash Beer* was also reviewed in *Micro Mart* issue 757.

Fantastic stuff. It really brought to me all the things going on within the spectrum community. I found the tutorial on bmp2scr very informative thanks. I have great respect for all those who have written spectrum emulators they've brought a lot of joy to my life and a sparkle to my eye as I revisit my youth. And programs such as 7up very useful.

But.....one thing I would love to see (well actually two) I wonder when any one will bother to write a shoot 'em up construction kit for the spectrum? I had a lot of fun with this on the 64 and AtariST. Perhaps it could use a program like 7up to produce backgrounds, sprites and loading screen\$ and then writ a .TZX file which you could use on an emulator or a real spectrum. Colour scrolling, fine or smooth, multi colour sprites (like Light force, or Zynaps).

Perhaps even programming tools to write a game from scratch, port it to an emulator to check if it crashes and again produce a .TZX file to load up on your humble speccy (maybe even Chronosoft may distribute it for you!). The bedroom coder returns!!!!

Any way enough rambling please keep up the good work!

DRaLLaFE

Budding bedroom coders might like to check out one of Chronosoft's exciting future releases: PLATFORM GAME DESIGNER by Jonathan Cauldwell. Keep an eye on www.chronosoft.co.uk for news of the release date.

Spectrum Computing Today is wonderful. I just found it. Here's a modest proposal that the speccy community might consider. It is designed to stimulate discussion.

A goal: to create a new Spectrum capable of running the old software we know and love, but extensible, flexible, and powerful: a low-cost, easy-to-use, and easy-to-program computer.

There are some really inspired and dedicated hardware and software enthusiasts out there, most short of time and money, who produce some amazing work, & who could contribute coherently to a new Spectrum. They need support.

There must be enough speccy enthusiasts around to contribute enough micropayments, one way and another to build-up a fund to offer grants to these individuals to produce the component parts of a new speccy, working together online in the spirit of the Linux/Open Source community, but without the unfortunate political splits and fragmentation.

Any such fund would need to be placed in a secure account with a real bank, and funds released from it only when all members of an elected board agree unanimously, after taking public submissions, that an individual or group is capable and willing to produce a specific piece of work.

The group should be a non-profit making trust, publishing its accounts online.

The board might be constituted of say 6 to 12 trusted representa-

tives from the speccy enthusiast community, chosen by an initial vote on a major Speccy website, meeting regularly online. All facets of the scene should be represented. The members would elect a chairperson for the year. The other members could vote off any single member for any specific misdemeanour. The original members voting unanimously could create a new member. This sounds unduly officious, but only by offering a centralised virtual 'HQ' to offer some direction and coherence to future Spectrum development, are we going to get a new machine.

Any new Spectrum design should be extensible, modular, and fully and freely documented.

The IDSA copyright issue will not go away and should be seen as a wake-up call, requiring a practical, mature, and legal response (even if privately, we think it is a sledgehammer-to-crack-a-nut piece of corporate thuggery). Bluntly, a new Spectrum is going to have to have a 48k compatibility mode- perhaps compatibility modes for other original versions too. This is the **only** way we can ensure that the machine will run the vast amount of original software, from the original cassettes, that made it famous. Any other solution will involve legal grief that will get in the way of our goals.

A specific form might be drawn up to allow those holding the copyright of Spectrum games to (a) surrender that copyright to the board, allowing the software to be freely disseminated, or (b) permit an authorised and respected software company to re-release the software, within specific constraints, paying a royalty to the current copyright holder for each sale ('Ultimate' titles spring to mind here). Those who create wonderful things ought to be rewarded for their

efforts. This would make it possible to bring classic titles back into general availability.

Multiple hardware modes should allow for different developments to operate on a basic piece of hardware. Rather like the Sideways-ROM board on the BBC Micro. The original Spectrum was designed to be an affordable computer, and this is one of the ethics we should embrace.

A new Spectrum should utilise wherever possible, standard, cheap, and easily available hardware components, or we will end up with two entire layers of retro supply problems and added costs. The 3.5" floppy disk, the PC keyboard, the PS/2 mouse and SVGA graphics spring to mind.

A new Spectrum may be produced under a proper contract, at an 'all costs' price, when a fixed number of pre-orders have been made, and the funds deposited with the board, to make it viable.

Most enthusiasts seem to want a new Spectrum as a new computer, although the other options need to be considered and perhaps supported.

The emulator/OS path.

The prospect of creating the new Spectrum as either an emulator, or as an Operating System for the PC architecture should be considered. I think we would lose something important, but with second hand PCs now so cheap, it is an option.

The extensible terminal path.

Another alternative would be to use a real Spectrum as either (1) ■ standard Spectrum or (2) a terminal for an external, new computer based on a more modern chip from the Z80 family. In basic Spectrum mode, software stored on ■ drive attached to the new CPU unit would be copied into the Spectrum's memory ROM-

cartridge style, from the external unit. In extended mode, the Spectrum would act as a terminal to access the new CPU unit's features.

The Sprinter path.

Adoption of a current or future variant of the Sprinter, supporting development and reducing costs would be a delicate path to pursue as it is an extant commercial product.

We need to work together to make ■ new Spectrum happen or it won't, so flexibility may be the order of the day.

We may be embarking upon a fairly new way of developing a technology-consumer-driven product development.

Best wishes,

David Hamison

Thank you for your comments David. You present some interesting ideas, which I'm sure will get many who read your letter thinking. I hope we receive some responses.

Personally - and as I said last issue - I don't think there is a market for a new Spectrum, and I don't think there is a need or even a desire amongst Spectrum enthusiasts for one. I do like the idea of new peripherals you can plug into the back of a standard Spectrum, however, because for me the whole point of using the Spectrum in the 21st century is pushing back the limits that bit further; interfacing the old with the new, and so on.

I downloaded issues 1 to 4 at work and have read 1 and 2 so far (luckily CodeWarrior takes a long time to compile things :-). You probably know who I am as you mention my name in issue 1. Issue 2 rates only a 6 as a lot of it is either things I well know (the beginner/restarter stuff) or things of no interest (I don't do Windoze;

I am sending this on an Amiga, though I have a Linux box here too for SimCoupe etc.

You might like to pass on a couple of links to your readers.

These point to my reviews of Spectrum emulators on Amiga and Linux systems (I've reviewed the ones on Qdos too, but not currently on line):

<http://www.simon.mooli.org.uk/AF/7.html>

<http://www.simon.mooli.org.uk/LXF/Spectra/Spectra.html>

I now work with SAM ROM and Beta BASIC author Dr. Andy Wright, by the way. We both write assembler (preferably) and bits of C and C++ (to get the assembler started) on Playstation 2 these days.

I've had a couple of things mentioned recently in the SAM Profi club mag - professional-looking A5 like yours, but more German - and still read and write for Quanta and QL Today. Recent Sinclair releases from me include MIDI and sampled sound updates for QLs and emulators, the long-lost SAM BASIC Compiler Lightning (based on Zip) and Sam Fractal Explorer - 256x192 Mandelbrot in 16 colours in less than 25 seconds, on a Z80B. :-)

I'm currently waiting for back-issues of SAM Revival. I stopped reading CSS years ago (no time for more screen-sifting) but still get spams to prove I was there :-).

Your efforts are appreciated and I look forward to reading issues 3 and 4 over the next few days.

Cheers

Simon N. Goodwin

Ex Crash, Your Spectrum, Your Sinclair, Sinclair User, ZX Computing, Computing Today, Practical Computing,

Personal Computer World, Amiga Format, Linux Format etc., **etc.**

Glop/Amusement Park

Author: Jonathan Cauldwell (Gloop published by Cronosoft) Price: £2.99 (Gloop) / Free (Amusement Park)
 Download: www.cronosoft.co.uk (Gloop), <http://members.fortunecity.com/jonathan6/egghead/id7.html>

Jonathan Cauldwell is a relatively recent Spectrum Hero, but here he most certainly is and I for one give him a jolly big thumbs up for being a genuine HuBWAW (Human Being Who Adds to the World). *Egg-head in Space*, through its Cronosoft release, has contributed greatly towards a rejuvenation of the Spectrum software scene: future Cronosoft releases include brand new titles, including Jonathan's own eagerly awaited Platform Games Designer, and the forums at WoS are alive with games designing chatter. If it seems like much ado is being made of just a few more titles to add to the many thousands already freely available then

you've missed the point; the awakening here is not so much to do with the return of commercially available Spectrum software as it is to do with the re-realisation that designing Spectrum software is fun (as is the reviewing of it, as is the anticipation of the new release and as is the experience of the purchase of something real - you can write all the emulators you want, but Spectrum software is the very lifeblood of the scene, and it just doesn't feel fully alive without it). We did actually know this already, but the prospect of publication and a tenner or two to fund our next ebay purchase was just the little extra bit of motivation needed to float the idea back into consciousness.

The plot of **Gloop**: mutant aliens intent on taking over the world have established for themselves a reputation for getting in the way of a good day. Once again, then, it's up to you to prevent the end of the status quo, and into the aliens' base - a deserted warehouse - you rush. Your mates, meanwhile, support you from outside, lobbing in energy giving sweets through a hole in the roof to sustain you and gum with which to shoot bubbles at the nasty critters and send them from whence they came.

Yeah, right - like that takes more than one pair of hands. "I'm going in to defeat the aliens from robbing us of our futures - who's with me?" cries the hero. "We're all with you," comes the passionate reply, "and we'll be right here, throwing in confectionary through t'hole yonder. Maximus here will run as one with the wind to the newsagent at the corner of High



Street - the one with the Snickers bars on special offer. Frederick will keep a lookout for any pigeons passing over the dodgy roof and cry warning should a package through the hole not be of Maximus' doing. I'll, er, administrate..."

Gloop is Jonathan's third release under the Cronosoft label (although it was actually written in 1994) and - and I'm going to come right out and say this - for me it's not one of his best. Unlike

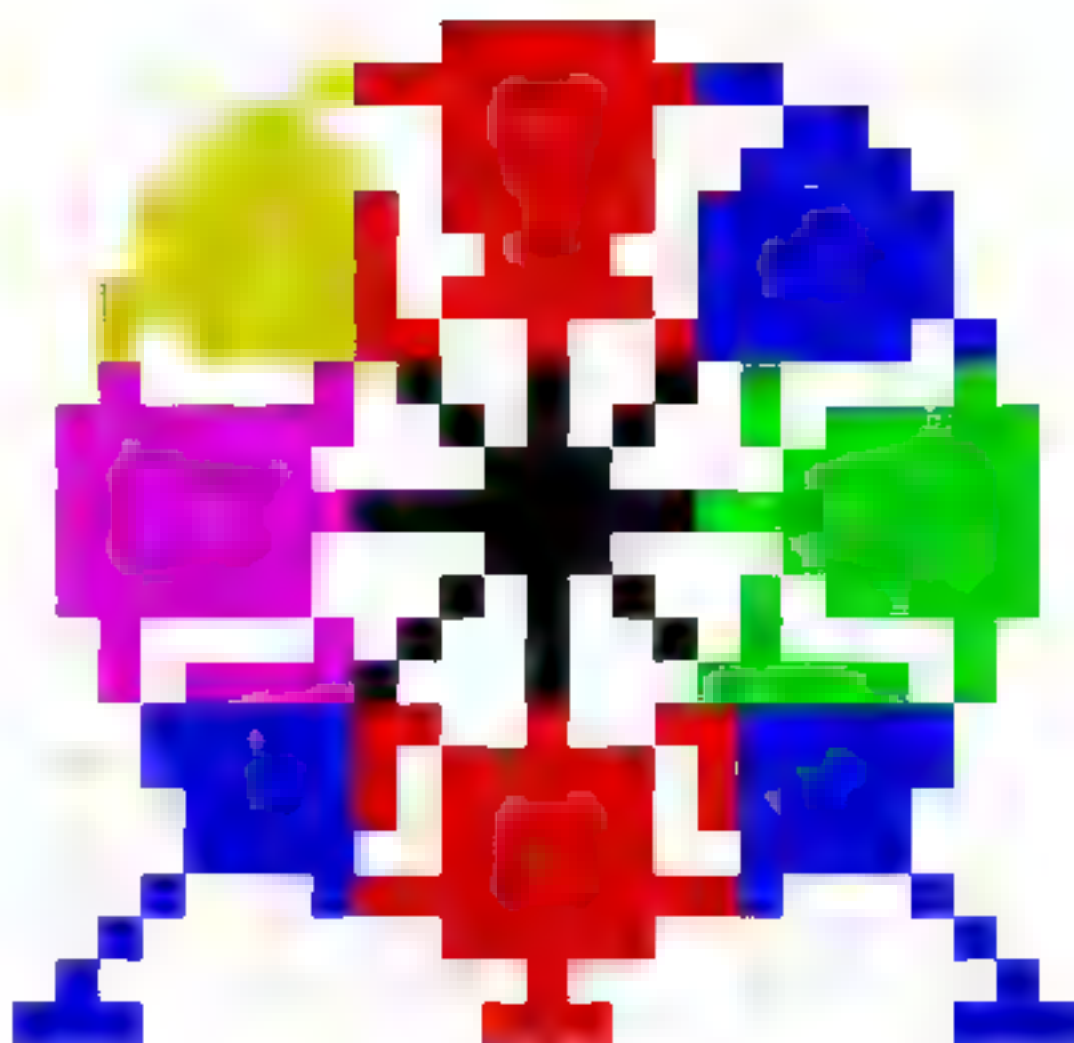




Egghead in Space and *Dead or Alive* the hook to keep you playing just simply isn't there. There's nothing overtly bad about the game - the sprites are large and well drawn, and float around the screen very smoothly indeed - but after you've bloated a few nasty aliens off the screen with your gum fuelled bubbles, you're left wandering what else there is to do. The screens do change, but the gameplay remains pretty much the same.

If *Gloop* is a Cauldwell average (and still - I might add - better than I could ever achieve with my non-existent knowledge of machine code), then **Amusement Park**, Jonathan's entry into this year's minigame competition (see new) is a masterpiece. And it's written - wait for it - in just 4k of code. Most of us have probably downloaded our fair share of size-restricted demos and games in the past and marvelled at what's been achieved in such a tiny amount of memory, but - let's be honest here - it's not as though the games are actually all that playable. *Amusement Park*, however, had a friend and I up 'til 2am two nights in a row trying to make our fortune through bouncy castles and amazing mazes. Addictive just isn't the word.

Amusement Park is one of those games that sees you ascribing human qualities to routines so small a Quicksilver ant could probably gobble them up and still have room for more. Am I the only one to have spotted, for example, that some of the little stick people that march merrily into the park seem to get away without paying? And are those one or two punters that spend month after month waiting in the entrance to the ferris wheel really under the impression that their turn has not yet come and the wait will be worth it nonetheless, or do we have a vagrant problem? The deeper you get into the game, the more the 4K restriction on the



coding becomes apparent: you can't add more than 10 rides, for example, which led (on night two) to the conception of 'Statue City' as the best way to up our ranking: all of this, however, only seems to increase the game's addictiveness and enjoyability - the sight of a single visitor spending several years staring at a sea of identical statues led to some inspired speculation on his/her predicament (and all this, by the way, without alcohol).

So *Amusement Park* is probably best experienced with a friend. My friend on these two evenings had never actually heard - let alone seen - a Spectrum before, so s/he doesn't need to be Sinclair literate. A young Internet gamer, Serban told me initially he didn't like the look of Spectrum games since the graphics were no good. Night three is now already planned, however, and will involve the game being played in two emulator windows so we can compete directly. A convert? Well he's all set to download **Spectaculator** for himself when he goes home.

As I understand it, Jonathan plans

to develop *Amusement Park* into a fully fledged 16K title for Cronosoft (never before has 16K sounded like so much memory). It is my sincere hope that the basic game stays pretty much the same, albeit with a few extra features. May I humbly suggest security guards, for example, to track down those rogue freeloaders (why should the honest customers suffer through increased ticket prices?) and burger bars to feed those long-term visitors (a death in the park would not be good PR). This will be a title I will really look forward to.



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RETROSPECTIVE... 1982

A brand new column: Matthew Hamdine looks back over the golden years.

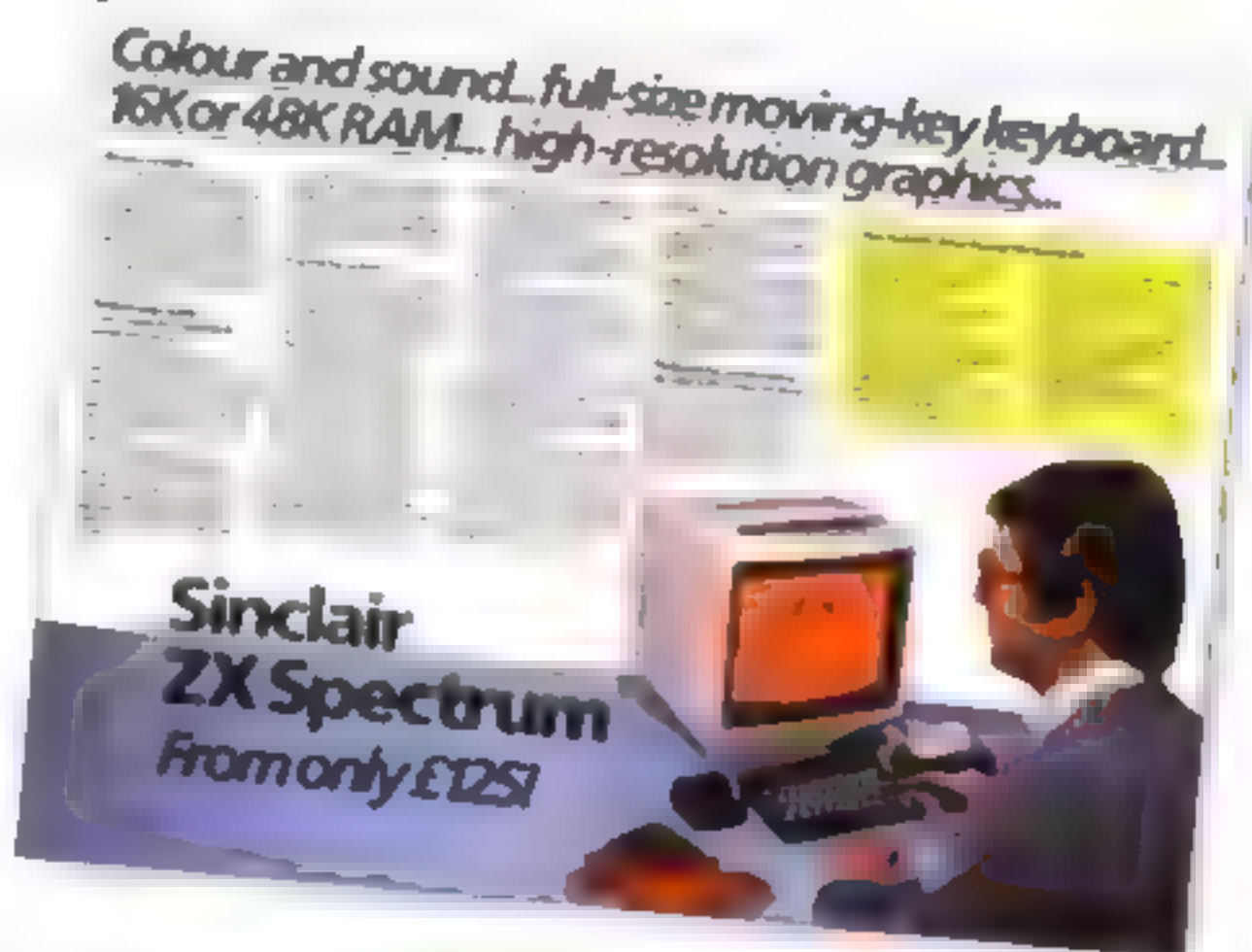
The Beginning...

Not all of us will remember 1982 that clearly, I certainly don't! Being merely 5 years old at the time is my excuse. I came to the Spectrum much later, during 1987 in actual fact, and it was somewhat 'old hat' then (although still great fun!). Over the following years, my interest in older computers has grown and I spend a lot of time researching their fascinating histories. This column is an attempt to serialise the history of this superb little machine of which I am very fond, year by year. We start with the beginning for the Spectrum, the year 1982.

Sir. Clive's ZX80, and more so the ZX81 bought computing into Joe Public's home and left him wanting much more, in excess of 50,000 ZX80's and 300,000 ZX81's were sold; that's a Sinclair computer in 1 out of 46 (quick and dirty calculation) UK homes even before the launch of the Spectrum.

Annoyed at missing out to former Sinclair employee Chris Curry's Acom when the tender for the BBC Computer Literacy Project was decided in Acom's favour, Sir. Clive decided that a sophisticated new machine was required to compete with the new offerings from the new companies. There was no way the ZX81 could hope to compete with the BBC Model A/B machine that had won the tender for the BBC's new project. Thankfully a new machine was already on the agenda, code-named ZX82. It was to stay with the philosophy of the earlier machines but provide much more.

The result was the ZX Spectrum, with enhanced graphics in eight colours and sound. Launched in



April 1982 at the Earls Court computer fair in London at £125 for the 16Kb model and £175 for the 48Kb model it was incredible value, although most customers were made to wait until at least June for their machines to be delivered - despite the 28 day lead time promised! The 16Kb model didn't last very long, with most people opting for the larger 48Kb of memory from the start. An upgrade was available at £60 to take a 16Kb machine up to its full complement and by the end of the year, the 16Kb model was discontinued due to lack of sales. Typical Sinclair Research production problems initially restricted sales of the Spectrum, demand was massive in comparison to the company's own forecast. By December, these problems were ironed out and coupled with lucrative deals with the high street's biggest retailers, WH Smith, Boots, and John Menzies (to name a few) the original Spectrum went on to sell in its hundreds of

thousands. It was eventually replaced by the Spectrum + in 1984, but we'll get to that in a later installment.

Competition Old and New...

There was also plenty going on outside the Spectrum world in 1982. Mettoy subsidiary Dragon Data announced the Dragon 32 in August, and it was to become Wales' most notable contribution to the fledgling home computer industry. The Dragon was an advanced machine, powerful and expandable - a decent alternative to the BBC Microcomputer. It was also compatible (due to some questionable engineering practices which nearly ended in acrimony) with the Tandy Colour Computer. It was more expensive than the Spectrum at £199.

Disenchanted Sinclair employees, Richard Altwasser and Steven Vickers, left to set up Cantab which produced the Jupiter Ace in late 1982. The Ace was based

upon the ZX80 but used the FORTH programming language in place of Sinclair BASIC. The BBC Microcomputer, supported by the BBC, made promising inroads into UK schools and, surprisingly, the US market.

November saw the announcement of the Oric 1. The Oric 1 was expected later in November and well in advance of Christmas, although the launch was then delayed until early December. It was unclear as to whether the Oric made it for Christmas 1982. Either way, this would only have been to the Spectrum's advantage. The Oric was a superior machine to the Spectrum in many ways, sporting 16 colours and better sound (courtesy of an AY-3-8912 which, incidentally, was used on later Spectrum models). At £99 in its 16Kb guise and £169 for the fully-loaded 48Kb model it was cheaper too! This probably forced Sinclair's hand when it came to Spectrum price reductions in the first quarter of 1983.

While the Ace remains a historic oddity and the Oric and Dragon were only marginally successful (the reasons are many and debatable) the Spectrum survived their challenge admirably, going from strength to strength. Familiarity with the ZX81, Sinclair's public profile, and its software catalogue must have helped.

Software

In 1982, the initiative for ZX Spectrum software production was well and truly on Sinclair Research's shoulders. This is usually the case with new machines, a manufacturer needs a certain software base to give an initial momentum. It was the same with the 80's home video revolution. VHS won its fight with Betamax simply because there was more software, i.e. video tapes!

Sir. Clive didn't intend the new machine to be just for games, which

is unfortunate since that is mainly what it was used for! Sinclair enlisted both ICL (now absorbed into the Fujitsu group) and long term partner Psion to produce a range of cassettes embodying education, novelty, business and productivity, and, of course, games software.

They were not well received. At £4.95 for the cheapest titles, Spectrum User (December 1982) complained that "people expect better games for this price". They also added that "there are no really outstanding tapes in the series so far" and noted that some titles were just a "rehash" of existing ZX81 titles.

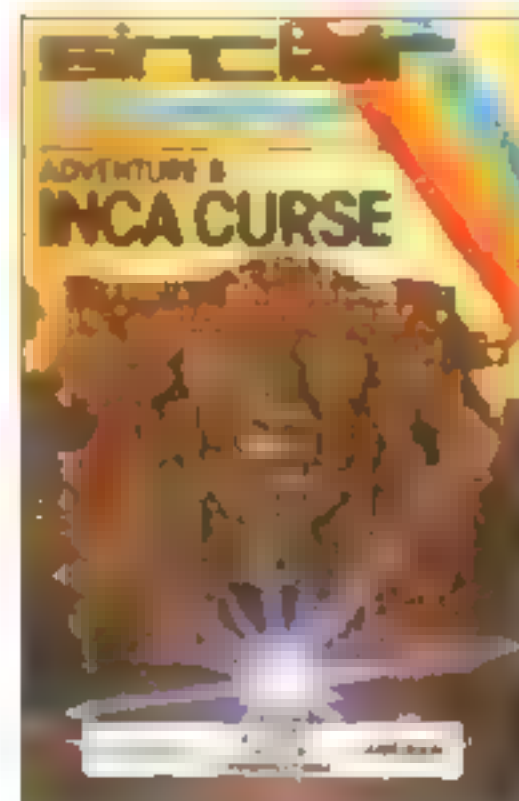
They certainly weren't the best. 'Space Raiders' was a 'Space Invaders' clone, 'Hungry Horace' was a 'Pacman' clone (might as well buy an Atari, huh?), and VU-CALC was the ZX81's limited spreadsheet albeit in updated form. And these were from the Psion produced titles which were considered of higher quality. ICL did redeem itself with its 'Blorhythms' and 'Geography' educational series of tapes.

There were exceptions to the "in-house" rule. Take Bug-Byte for instance which produced popular titles for the Acorn machines and a whole host of "cottage industry" producers, most run by teenagers who had learned to program on the earlier machines. The big players, the software superstars, of the coming decade, Ocean, Activision, Microprose, Mirrorsoft etc. didn't catch on until later but owe their Spectrum software market to the original Sinclair software and the bedroom enthusiasts.

Next issue: 1983

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C R O N O S O F T

If 2002 was a vintage emulator year, 2003 looks set to be remembered as a classic year for new Spectrum software. In years to come, in fact, we might remember *Cronosoft*, **Simon Ulyatt's** new retro-software label, as a very important landmark indeed. Here he shares with us some reflections on the last few months and on the modern retro scene.

It's been many, many years since a commercial game release for the ZX Spectrum. Oh, we've seen a few odd downloadable titles over the years - probably most of them Manic Miner remakes (and there's only so much Willy that a man can take, so to speak) - but it's been quite a while since anyone has offered an honest-to-goodness real, physical, tangible tape in a box. And yet, when you check out the ebay auctions, there are literally hundreds of Spectrum cassettes on sale at any given moment. Given that the vast majority of these could be downloaded for nowt at WoS and loaded into emulators that are now so good they stop short only from the emulation of the cold cup of tea you re-discover at the end of a game of Zynaps, do you think there is a growing demand for the Real Spectrum Experience?

Definitely! Using an emulator, whilst handy and convenient, is not a patch on using the real thing.

Emulators definitely have their place, and are excellent for many reasons. If you fancy a quick blast with the 5 minutes you have to spare, or you want to check out a load of software that you've downloaded quickly, then they're so much more convenient. Also, they offer many more benefits when developing new software too.

After all, ■ programmers in the early 1980s had access to hard drives, and PC software for developing games, then the whole gaming history may have been different :)

Having said all that, I don't really enjoy playing games as much on an emulator as much as using the real Spectrum. Emulated games just don't cut it for me... It's perverse to say, but the disadvantages of using a real Spectrum, make it better. Yes.. it takes a long time to load the game, but there's the anticipation....! Also, using an old TV gives a much less sharp picture than a PC monitor, but then the graphics look smoother and less blocky. I'm sure there's a benefit of using a wobbly Kempston joystick interface, but I haven't thought of one yet :)

I believe that I'm not the only one to think like this. Also having a shelf full of original Spectrum software is far more preferable (and impressive) than having a desktop folder full of .TAP files.

On that point, I couldn't agree more. My own modest collection of titles ■ growing by the week, and damn if ■ doesn't look good on the shelf above my desk (my wife disagrees with me; I really can't think why). I might mention that the latest additions up there include - at the moment - the first two Cronosoft titles, and they don't look out of place one smidgen. How does it feel to

know your releases are now out there swelling the prized personal collections of die-hard Spectrum fans?

It's great to think of the games being part of people's collections, and I'm sure it's a good feeling for the authors too. Of course, the games are not going to be produced in the same numbers of those from the golden age of the Spectrum, so it would be fantastic to think of them becoming a future collectible rarity.

Retro computing generally seems to be enjoying a bit of a purple patch at the moment, if the attention being given to the old 8 and 16 bit platforms by the mainstream press is anything to go by. Why do you think this is and do you think interest has peaked yet?

I think interest has probably peaked, and I think it's reached a plateau. There are many people who are 100% into supporting the older systems (as opposed to those that perhaps casually bought a copy of Namco Museum for their Playstation). I think that if a person ever had any interest in rediscovering an old system, then they would have done it by now, unless they have been living under a stone for the past few years :)

Retro gaming is fashionable at the moment, which is good for

showing younger players how games have developed, but I don't see the casual user (in that I mean those people that never owned the original system when it was popular) sticking with it for the long term.

It'll always be popular with the real retro gamers though. Most seem to be aged around the late 20s to mid 30s, are married, perhaps with families - and long for the days when games and computers were interesting and exciting. These people, that were kids in the early 80s, now have the money and ability to find and buy all of the games they wanted but could never afford all those years ago.

We have a gaming heritage in this country, with the Spectrum especially, that we should be truly proud of, and it's up to us 30-somethings to make sure that it's not forgotten!

ZXF has received letters - just a few - from youngsters getting into the Spectrum scene who were too busy tackling such milestones as walking, talking and solid food back in the mid 80s to be aware of the Spectrum. Do you think the machine can have an appeal to 'the youth of today' - and, if so, on what grounds?

I do think the Spectrum can have an appeal to younger people, but not in the same way as it affects us 'thirtysomethings'. There are always some who will want to find out the roots of gaming as we know it, (and good for them!) but I think for the majority, the lack of eye and ear candy that the Spectrum brings, may not be enough to tempt them away from today's consoles. I definitely don't want to type-cast or insult today's generation of gamers in any way, but the Mega Drive, or Playstation are to them, what the Spectrum, or Amiga is to us. I guess it must be hard to get

nostalgic, or so enthusiastic for a machine that was made 'before your time'.

Cronosoft is not exclusively a Spectrum label - from the onset you have asked for software from any retro format - yet so far only Spectrum titles have appeared. Given that we know that the other formats have very active scenes - particularly Commodore, of course - why do you think this is?

Well... this is partly my fault! Although I'm a fan of especially the Spectrum and C64, my knowledge of all things Spectrum is far more advanced than that of the C64. I have in the past few weeks, gained the rights to



distribute a number of Commodore 64 games, but I'm trying (& struggling) to find a way to convert these disk image files into a format that can be distributed on tape, that will load both quickly and reliably. Uncle Clive, in his infinite wisdom, produced a tape loading system that is fast and forgiving for the Spectrum. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the C64.

Commodore stuff will be appearing soon though, I'm happy to say :)

There is also a major difference though between the Spectrum and Commodore scenes. There

are very few C64 users that still rely on cassettes for data storage - with floppies and hard drives being very much the norm these days, whereas with the good ol' Speccy, the sheer number of people with standard tape systems ensures that cassette games will always be well received.

I've yet to see if the prospect of luring C64 owners back to their datasets will be successful!

Generally speaking, what's the response been to Cronosoft's request for new titles?

On the whole it's been encouraging. Once I get the Commodore side sorted, there should be a healthy range of titles available. Also, Jonathan Cauldwell (Egghead in space, Dead or Alive etc.) is currently working on new titles, including the R-Type inspired shoot-em-up 'More Tea Vicar?' and is also ironing out the bugs from 'Platform Game Designer'. As long as there is a steady flow of new games, then things will be great.

I am a little disappointed that some of the less popular machines haven't had any submissions though. I'd really love to release software for the ZX81, Vic 20, or Dragon 32 for example.

As a Spectrum fan yourself, when did you get back into the modern Spectrum scene - or did you never leave? Aside from Cronosoft, of course, what do you think is the most exciting thing going on in the community today?

I never left completely...I stopped using my Spectrum as a main micro around 1992, when I moved on to the ST & Amiga. Around 1997, I got internet access, and went emulator crazy! The idea of being able to download and play all of those



old classics again was a real draw, and was my main reason for getting on the 'net. In the past year or two, finding the site WOS (World Of Spectrum) has fulfilled every need, and keeps me in contact with like minded people!

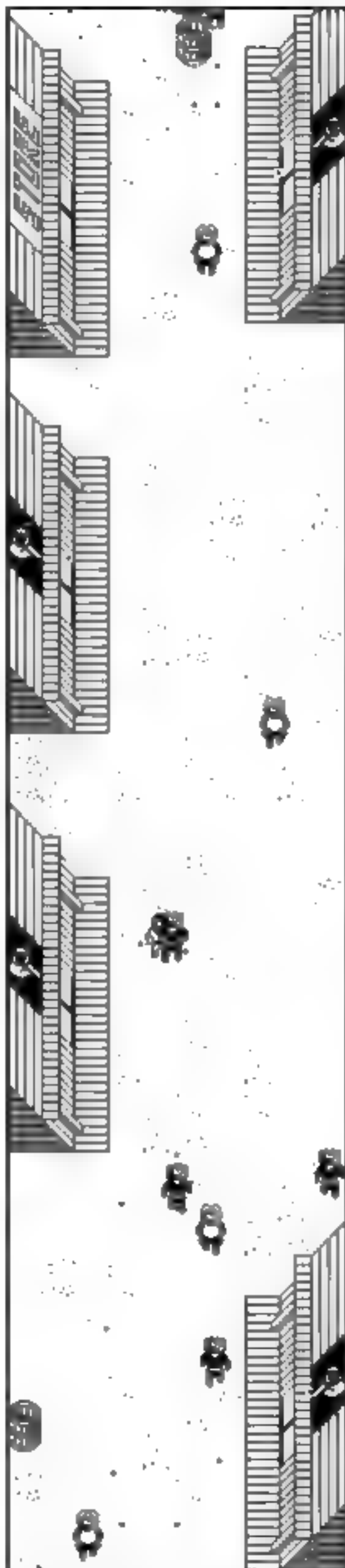
World Of Spectrum has got to be the best thing that has happened in years - unlike some internet communities, it's really active, with many enthusiastic and helpful members. There's barely a day goes by when I don't go to the site and read the forums!

We see quite a bit of you in WoS forums, but I don't recall ever catching sight of you in comp.sys.sinclair. Do you think WoS forums are becoming the new main arena for on-topic Spectrum discussions?

I've had a look on comp.sys.sinclair a bit, but there seems to be an awful lot of irrelevant information. The WOS community seems a more accessible and friendly place to be, and you seem to get to know the regulars on there quite well. I don't know how others feel, but the WOS forum is the place to be for me! It also has the advantage in that you're not bombarded by spam by having your name on there!

Back to Cronosoft: what inspired you to develop this label? When did the idea come to you?

Ever since the mid 80s, I've really wanted to get a program that I'd written published. However - I'm not that great a programmer, so I thought that the next best thing would be to run a software label. I'm really surprised, that with the advent of the internet age, that for the most part, someone hasn't actually done it already. I'm sure, that like me, there are loads of people that have written games, but were too late to get them published by the



The law comes to town: asserting your authority in *Dead or Alive*

mainstream industry.

Alternatively, maybe they would like to write a game, if they could get it published/distributed/appreciated.

It must be very demoralising to write a great game, only to find that no-one really takes notice of it. And, with the only real option being to make it freely downloadable from a website, any future classic is surely going to be overlooked.

Anyway - that was the inspiration! The idea, though it's always been in the back of my mind, came after I finishing off editing the magazine 'Rhetoric', which was the last remaining Oric magazine, around the end of last year. I tested the water by posting a message on the WOS forum, and was contacted immediately by Jonathan Caudwell. He had a ready made game for release (*Egghead in Space*). It all happened (very quickly) from there!

The response in WoS forums has been somewhat ecstatic. Were you surprised by such a positive reception?

Definitely! There was such enthusiasm and support, and most importantly, people that we're willing to help too - from the programmers, to people like Tommy Pereira (Amigo) who's done a fantastic job in promoting Cronosoft to many other forums and communities.

The wonderful thing was that people were really excited at getting the new software. Some have remarked that getting the games to load by adjusting the volume controls on their cassette players, and actually waiting to load the games was all part of the fun. It was a real nostalgia trip for them - maybe the inconvenience that we lost when we moved to emulators, was also the thing that made us

enjoy games more.

Talk us through the processes a new game submitted to you has to go through. I realise it's still probably too early for any set procedures to have been established, but it would be interesting to know what sort of work needs to be done and by whom. Do you design all the inlay card covers, for example? What software do you use to record TZX files onto tape? And so on.

It's all very 'amateur' - anyone could do it! With all of the previous games, the author has sent me a file for use with an emulator, such as a .TAP or .TZX file. I can have a good checkout of the game, and test it out etc.

I then use the software TAPER, to record the software onto audio tape. TAPER doesn't always seem to make a perfect recording, as the Spectrum would do, so I use that stone age piece of software 'THE KEY' to clean it up a bit. It'll load in, and save out a perfect copy, so I put this onto a professional tape. I can then do the duplication myself using the good old tape to tape method, using a decent deck. I decided to do this myself to start with, because I have no real idea how successful a game will be, and I don't have to commit large sums of money on getting 1000s of each game duplicated professionally. I do use professional tape though, supplied by a company that does duplication. That way, I can get nice quality, short, and completely unbranded tapes, that I can label myself.

The inlays I've all done myself, though I admit I'm no artist, so should anyone want to use their own design, I'm completely happy with that. I have a set of templates set up in MS Publisher, so the logo's and colour coding

are uniform across the range. It's then just printed out on gloss card.

It really is just a 100% DIY system, but seems to work

Cronosoft has been going for a few months now. The four Spectrum titles you've published so far have been genuinely new insofar as they've not been previously published anywhere, but - with the exception of Egghead in Space - not new as in only very recently written (and please feel free to correct me on that if it's wrong). I guess the most exciting thing about the label is that it might inspire



Hop'n'chop: because all I ever wanted to be was a lumberjack....

people to start *writing* games again (ie, not just dusting off old games they never got around to submitting for publication - not that dusting off and submitting previously unreleased games is a bad thing, of course). Now this is obviously not going to happen overnight, because the games have to be - well - written. Like I said, Cronosoft is still a youngster, but are you aware of any brand new software under development for possible future submission to the label?

The origins of the software varies! Egghead in Space was actually revamped especially for the Cronosoft release (new screens were added to a version that had been available for free download). The other titles,

you're right in saying we're unreleased, but dusted off items so to speak.

Of the future releases, FOOTBALL GLORY is a previously unreleased game, whereas PLATFORM GAME DESIGNER was a half written previously abandoned project, that has now been finished off and tidied up for release. Jonathan Caudwell's MORE TEA VICAR?, which is an R-TYPE inspired shooter, is a brand new game, and is being developed as we speak (and is looking absolutely fantastic by the way!).

Also, I've had emails from a couple of people saying that they are developing games that may be of interest to the label, one of which is a text adventure type game. Whether these other projects will come to fruition, we can only wait and see.

Would you be interested in titles developed using Jonathan's game designer?

Yes, I'd quite happily accept these, but would most likely put them out at £1.99

Rather than see just basic Manic Miner rip-offs though, I'd like to see more imaginative and complex uses of the package. PGD is a powerful and flexible piece of software, and very different games are possible with a bit of ingenuity. Also, the way the software is written, it allows programmers to incorporate the stand alone game into their own programs, so proper front ends and presentation features can be added.

Also, for the record, I'm quite happy to accept software written using software like THE QUILL and GRAPHIC ADVENTURE CREATOR.



> PICK UP THE PEN

With the launch of ZXIF, a look at some of the issues relevant to writing Spectrum Interactive Fiction in the 21st Century.

One of the pieces of feedback I received from one of my **Blink** playtesters was, "think it's a good idea not to include graphics as people expect too much these days, so with just text, it's left to your imagination." Computer games, of course, have evolved a great deal since the Spectrum's heyday; the same is true of the adventure game, but where arcade games have added in just about every bell and whistle known to humankind over the last 20 or so years, the text adventure has evolved into a much simpler, purer artform. **Interactive Fiction** is the new title for this genre, in fact, and an appropriate one it is too, when you think about it. On download or purchase of an IF game it is a *piece of writing* that you have your hands on, after all, and thus it is the quality of the writing that counts. It's not that I'm against graphics in adventure games - I'm not; well chosen images can do a lot to enhance atmosphere - but when we're talking 48K Spectrum, the amount of memory you have available is already a limitation on the amount you can write - and if this is to be the main criteria by which your work will be judged, why sacrifice it for pictures which (in this day and age) are hardly likely to cause jaws to drop?

Adventure games used to be about problem solving more than anything else, with the quality of the writing taking something of a back seat. You visited locations. You found objects. you used the objects to solve problems. *Kill ogre*

with sword. Unlock the door with the blue key. And so on. Location descriptions were usually a few lines of fairly bland text (all in block capitals if you were really unlucky), starting with a sentence like, "I/You am/are in a big/little/dark/wallpapered room..." Sometimes the number of locations ran into triple figures, but quantity rarely bespoke quality. In my mind, the adventure games to appear on the Spectrum (although none of them were written specifically for the Spectrum) which pushed writing up the ladder of priority were titles such as *the Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and any of the **Magnetic Scrolls** adventures (*Jinxter* was a particular favourite of mine). These were titles that appeared fairly late into the Spectrum's day, but - other than memory (all the Magnetic Scrolls adventures, for example, were +3 only games) there is no reason I can think of why this sort of creativity could not have occurred earlier. To put it another way, there is no reason why a Spectrum IF game written today could not be judged alongside the very best of the genre - with only text to deal with, system specs become irrelevant (again - memory aside), the playing field is level and we are limited only by our imaginations <CLICHE>

Down to the practicalities: what do you need and where do you start? If you're the sort of person who is able to program a complete language parser (the code that analyses a player's instructions) then probably nothing

here will be new to you, the route that everyone else is likely to follow will be to use an adventure game authoring program. the program I'm most familiar with is the **Professional Adventure Writer (PAW)** by **Gilsoft**. This is the program I used to write **Blink** with and, many years ago, my first ever adventure game, **The Forest Stop**. I remember quite clearly falling in love with PAW when it first came out in 1986. My mate Trev and I had been playing around with **GAC** (Graphic Adventure Creator) from **Incentive** for quite a while, and were about to commit to authoring with it. I don't recall what it was that caused us therefore to get hold of PAW, but we were glad that we did. Little things - like being able to type into your code the actual words you had define in your vocabulary list, rather than just their numbers - made it a lot easier to use. Today, PAW still stands up well for ease of use; there are admittedly a few things that niggle, now that we're all spoilt by WYSIWYG word processors and the like - such as the absence of a copy and paste feature, and having to move backwards through text letter... by... letter... in order to edit something at the beginning - but these are minor - you soon get used to them - and some can be worked around by the creative use of emulators.

Following its initial release, PAW received a number of updates, the last (I believe) being version A17C. Along the way, the ability to load in third party modules - or

Top tips for using PAW with an emulator

'overlays,' as they were called - to add extra features to the system was included. Essentially a modular system anyway (48K users didn't get the whole system at once and had to load in and out of memory the various modules - location text, process tables, etc - as required, which must have been a chore), the potential for these was enormous, but the only commercially released overlays that I know of were the 3 Kelsoft modules (*Phos's*, *Mega* and). I wonder if there were others released into the public domain, however, and if you know of any I would really like to hear from you.

PAW is not the best that an adventure writing system for the Spectrum could possibly be - you are restricted to a 32 column display, for example (although you *could* define different character sets) and a 42 column display just looks so much nicer) - but in my mind, at least, it's by far the best there is available. CRASH even went so far as to call it the best utility ever written for the Spectrum. Not bad. Of course it is downloadable from WoS and - even better news - the rather excellent technical manual can also be accessed online at www.madhippy.com/8-bit/sinclair/paw/index.html

One final point is that another rather nice feature of using PAW is that you can now convert 48K PAW adventures to fully blown Windows adventures. You'll need Douglas Harter's **WinPAW** (www.winpaw.com) to do this, version 5.0 of which was released this July. You'll also need **UNPAWS** to decompile your original Spectrum adventure database, also available here. Both of these programs are freeware.

Got any comments on adventure writing? Send them to zdf@woodcock.co.uk

Use an emulator. You probably were going to anyway, but just in case you were tempted to go for the 'performance art' process of using real hardware, consider the pain of having to SAVE and VERIFY your adventure game database each time you end a PAW session with the simplicity of a quick snapshot save.

Speed up your emulator to about 300 per cent to speed up the entry of long text passages (the cursor gets slower... and... slower... the more you type). Any faster though and key presses might be missed. Speed it up all the way when using the text compressor, however.

Run two separate emulator windows - one for editing, the other for testing; alternatively you could use two separate emulators. Snapshot save your current 'state' and then load it into the other emulator to test. This way you can immediately edit/investigate any bugs you encounter without having to exit the test routine to get back to the editor.

Edit using SPIN. Pressing ENTER when you're editing text in PAW simply returns you to whatever sub-menu you came from. If you want to actually enter a carriage return (ie, to do what ENTER would normally do) you need to change the INK colour to white and press DELETE - to do the former you'll need to know which combination of PC keys mimics SYMBOL SHIFT EXTENDED whatever. But you don't have to worry about any of this if you're using SPIN: its excellent Keyboard Helper feature includes a *Modes* picklist, from which you can select 'White Ink' and then send this command to the emulated Spectrum. Of course you can also use this to change text colour easily, make text BRIGHT, and so on.

Ask a friend to playtest your adventure on an emulator. Ask two. Ask three. Get them to make an RZX recording of their test session(s) for you to watch. Aside from their general verbal/written feedback, the input recording will be an invaluable source of information for the sorts of commands/instructions they are expecting to be able to enter and which you might have overlooked. Oh, and make sure you leave a bit of memory spare on the test version so you can actually implement any modifications/suggestions that come out of the playtests.

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After Ceaucescu's death in 1990 over 120,000 children were discovered living in grim institutions. In the county of Jud Bihor in Western Romania, children who had been assessed as 'mentally retarded' at the age of three were sent to an institution in the country village of Cadea. They were housed in old buildings that had broken windows and no heating or plumbing. It was dark and dirty and for the majority of the time the children were confined to their cots. Most of them were tied to the bars by strips of cloth tied tightly around their wrists and ankles.

The children were always dirty, hungry and cold - sixty to seventy died every winter. Their original 'retardation' was the result of early illnesses such as pneumonia and bronchitis, and years of confinement at Cadea only compounded the problem. When they were finally released in January 1991, many could neither walk nor speak. All of the children rocked backwards and forwards in their distress; their eyes were glazed and unseeing. On release, many of the children were sent to hospital buildings in the mountain villages of Remeti and Bratca. It is here that the White Cross started assisting the local Romanian staff in their care.

Since the White Cross has been working with the children, over 600 people have travelled with the Mission to Romania. Some have only been able to give a few days of concentrated work, most average two months and one stayed for four years! Some work with the children, others repair the buildings and yet others deliver goods. Every volunteer is special. They raise their own money for air and train fares, insurance, food and electricity and more than half of them do it all over again and go out for a second or even third time. Old or young, with or without qualifications, the combined work and presence of these many different people has had an amazing impact on the children.

Children with blank, unseeing eyes, rocking in a world of their own are now healthy, laughing and boisterous. The accumulative effect of the White Cross volunteers with their mixture of naivety and experience, their energy, their perseverance, their hopes, their dreams and their many different ways of showing love has created a rainbow effect of bouncy, confident and individual children.

Fundatia Crucea Alba has helped White Cross Mission with the legalities of purchasing small farms, employing assistants and moving children from the mental institutions in order to live a normal family village life. We intend that these farms will be the children's homes for as long as they need. All their lives if necessary.

Buying the farms is only the beginning of a lifetime commitment to those children we take out of State care. Without a regular financial safety net we would be irresponsible if we established too many homes. We do, however, believe that this is the only way forward and are desperate for substantial funding.

The White Cross Mission is a Charitable Trust Registered in England No 1021176

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